The Goddess

By CHARLES GODDARD and GOUVERNEUR MORRIS

Novelized from the Photo Play of the same name produced by the Vitagraph Company

SYNOPSIS.

After the tragic death of John Amesbury, his prostrated wife, one of America's greatest beauties, dies. At her death Professor Stilliter, an agent of the interests, kidnaps her beautiful three-year-old baby girl and brings her up in a paradise where she sees no man, but thinks she is taught by angels, who instruct her for her mission to reform the world. At the age of eighteen she is suddenly thrust into the world, where agents of the interests are ready to pretend to find her. Fifteen years later, while in the Adirondacks, Tommy is the first to meet Celestia as she comes from her paradise; neither recognizes the other. Tommy rescues Celestia from Stilliter. They hide in the mountains. Later Stilliter gets Celestia back, and taking her to New York places her in Belleview hospital, where her sanity is proved. Returning to get her, he finds she has left with Tommy, who loses her in New York, but finds her next day living with the Douglas family. He follows Celestia to a factory, where she addresses the workers. A fire breaks out and Tommy saves her. Celestia attends a fashionable ball at Barclay's home. She at once becomes the center of attraction. Society accepts her message in a manner that greatly pleases the Triumvirate. She is sent to the mines to settle a strike; there she saves Tommy from being lynched. The miners have planned an attack upon the stockade. Kehr having hoped for this is well prepared. That night Celestia visits the stockade and speaks to Kehr's men, causing them to turn against him. Kehr has her locked up in the morning, but with Tommy's help she escapes and speaks to the miners. During one of these addresses Mary Blackstone, who is in love with Tommy, arrives in the mining town, and after displaying a string of valuable pearls to Mrs. Gunsdorf, solicits her aid in a plot to put an untimely end to Celestia. Stilliter, jealous, begins to use his hypnotic power over Celestia treacherously.

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CHAPTER XXII.

And at that moment there was a sound of footsteps just outside the tent. The feet which made the sound belonged to Freddie the Ferret. With his usual good luck he appeared to have arrived in the very nick of time. Professor Stilliter was not at that time to receive the kiss for which his greedy mouth was waiting.

"Wake up!" he said in a disgusted voice.

Celestia put her hands to her eyes, woke, and couldn't remember just what had been said.

"I think I'm too tired to talk," she said.

"So I see," said Stilliter, as Freddie entered the tent. "Better rest, then."

And the psychologist withdrew, quite sane again and rather badly frightened. An open-flapped tent was certainly no place for making love by violence; yet for a moment the cautious man had lost all thought of self-control and all fear of consequences.

It was on the afternoon of the next day that Barclay, Sturtevant and Semmes came to Bitumen with a whole trainload of capitalists, and bidable men expert in politics. The entire town—almost the entire township was at the station to meet them. Swaying and tottering above the heads of the crowd were all sorts of banners and transparencies, variously inscribed and emblazoned.

Vote for the New Constitution.
Kehr for Senator.
Every Citizen a Stockholder.
Dividends Instead of Taxes.

From the station to the stockade, now wide open, and shorn of its warlike barbarities, the crowd marched. When the head of the procession came near the tents of Celestia, set back from the road on a little knoll, it halted, and every man bared his head and began to shout her name. The shouting brought her presently to the door of the main tent—a slender, girlish figure all in white, who waved to her followers and adorers a white and slender hand.

Even at that distance her effect upon them was magical. Throats grew hoarse with shouting. Then she backed from their sight into the big tent, after one last wave of the hand. And they, because they knew that she would come to them later in the stockade and speak to them and fill their hearts full of hope and courage, allowed her now to withdraw from their sight, and, after one more minute of shouting they took up the march once more, and went roaring toward the stockade—late strikers, late strikebreakers, capitalists, politicians, men, women and children, all wild now, with excitement and enthusiasm—the two most contagious diseases in the world.

Celestia stood meanwhile in the center of the big tent; and she too was trembling with excitement and enthusiasm and the sense of personal triumph. And she looked so young and innocent, and beautiful, that for a moment the frown faded from Tommy Barclay's forehead, and the ache from his heart.

"Oh, Tommy," said Celestia, "you won't spoil it all now, will you? You'll be somewhere in the crowd where I can see your face, when I stand up to speak, won't you?"

"It goes to my heart," said Tommy, "to see how happy their love makes you. But I can't go to the stockade to be a face in the crowd. I'm afraid things might go to my head."

"I was so happy," said Celestia, "and now I'm not so happy."

"More people are in such a state of mind," said Tommy, "that if you said the word they would march on Washington and try to pull the president out of the White House. I've hoped against hope. I've seen your power, known that you had it, and hoped that you didn't really have it. You made a little mark on the great city of New York, you will go back on the wave of your triumph here and sweep it off its feet, as you have swept Bitumen. If you go to the stockade and show yourself once more to those crazy people and speak to them you will start a campaign of revolution that will sweep a sufficiently sane country off its feet. I see you floating from city to city and from village to village in your special train, winning all hearts, persuading all minds, and spreading, as I think, upon my honor, the seeds of national disaster. In the name of all that is most sacred to you, Celestia, stop while there is still time. Speak to those people if you must, but tell them that you have been deceived, that you are the plaything of capital, and that they have been deceived; wash your hands of politics and sophistries; step down; resign. In the image of all that is noble and fine, you have created a monster. Don't breathe the final breath of life into that monster and bring it to life—a Frankenstein that even you can never hope to control once it gets on its feet, and begins to think murderous thoughts. If you go to the meeting in the stockade you will bring this monster to life. Have you no fear of the consequences?"

She shook her head primly, but with a little sadness.

"Celestia," he said, "back of these tents the woods run to the hills, the hills to the mountains. Will you come?"

For a moment it appeared that she hesitated. Then she drew a deep breath and stiffened her spine.

"I believe," she said gently, "that God sent me to do what I have done and what I am going to do."

"I know that you believe that," said Tommy. "If I didn't know that you believed, I shouldn't let you go to the stockade."

"You couldn't hold me forever."

He drew the back of his hand across his eyes, as if to shut out some horrible scene.

"No," he said, "I couldn't hold you forever. They would come and take you away from me. I should have—you would have to be so that you couldn't speak to them—any more."

She came close to him and lifted her hands to his shoulders, and looked up into his eyes, a pitiful little figure, shrinking and frightened.

"You couldn't have the heart, Tommy—not me—no matter how wicked you thought I was."

"I couldn't," said Tommy, "thinking that you are a misguided angel of light. No, I couldn't. . . . Well, dear, God knows I wish I had your eloquence and power upon hearts. You won't find everybody on your side. You'll find many abler men than I talking and writing against you, and trying to save this country from madness. I—oh, I love you so that I feel as if my heart was breaking. And to think that I can't even wish you good luck."

"There's the motor for me now," said Celestia. "I know you can't wish me luck, but you could kiss me if you wanted to."

Those who had heard her speak before often said that she had never spoken so well as on that day at the stockade, with the exception of just the first few moments, when she seemed to be a little dazed and nervous. When she had finished and stood there swaying like a lily, and flushed with a sense of nobility of power and triumph, pandemonium broke loose.

Out of that pandemonium that began with cries of "Celestia—Celestia," another name gradually took form and substance—"Barclay—Barclay," they bellowed, at first in a kind of syncopated roar, then in unison, and finally with a rhythm that drove men half wild with the desire to be in time with it, and that actually made some of the buildings in the enclosure sway.

"Barclay—Barclay—we want Barclay; Barclay for president—Barclay—Barclay."

Thus the boom was launched. Barclay rose from his place on the platform, walked straight up to Celestia, took her right hand in his and lifted it to his lips. Then he turned, standing on her right hand and faced the shouting and the tumult. There was no smile of triumph in his face, only a look of grim, bulldog determination and probity.

After a long time they let him speak. And after he had spoken they went wild again.

"I will do what a man may," he said, in a voice that carried to the most remote pair of ears, "to make the wishes that you do me the honor of wishing, come true. If I am elected president, I will make these United States into a fit habitation for men and women and little children. So help me God!"

A little later Barclay's secretary stole away to the telegraph station and sent a message. An hour later the inhabitants of Bitumen, dispersed now, and for the most part drunk, were electrified by the spectacle of a snow-white train of cars that pulled slowly into the station, and was then backed on to a siding.

Celestia transferred her few belongings from her tent to the rear car of this train. The car ahead was for Stilliter and certain other managers and advisers. The next car was the office car. The one ahead of that was for a chosen body of select, able and pampered correspondents.

The snow-white train pulled out of Bitumen and the whirlwind campaign began.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Other trains were making whirlwind tours of these United States. Not every capitalist was on the side of capital. A badly frightened and very able man in the White House was fighting for his political life. Into the arena there came at last a dribbling of genuine patriots, who, like their forefathers, were ready to give for their country their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.

It wasn't all smooth sailing, by any means. Still no new movement had ever made such progress in so short a time, and the end was not in sight, nor the beginning of the end.

A man gaining in strength from day to day, among those who stood for the old order of things, and opposed Celestia, was Tommy Barclay. He had a great fervid quality of honesty which no one could doubt, and he had a look on his face, very lean now from short nights, hard work, and the constant buffetings of trains, of a young hero who has set himself to do to death a dragon that is ravaging a countryside. With experience and practice had come quick initiative in emergencies, ease, and the better control of a naturally fine and far-carrying voice.

His triumphs were many. His downfalls came when he crossed Celestia's path too closely. If she was speaking by chance in the same town at the same time, he would have no more of an audience than he could have counted on the fingers of his hands. If he followed her too closely he spoke to deaf and unsympathetic ears.

"The crime of the ages," said one rough miner, who was suffering from too much heart, too much whisky and too little mind, "you great big, whistlin', thunderin' boob, did you ever set eyes on the lady?"

And Tommy to his horror had failed to find an answer to that question anywhere in his head, and had stammered and become tongue-tied, and been bored, and had done harm to a cause, which, so fanatical he had become, at this time, seemed to mean life and death to him.

In exalted moments he felt that he had crushed the love of Celestia out of his heart.

Once, in a little northern town, standing on an improvised rostrum of packing cases, and in the midst of addressing a large crowd of quiet, sensible people, who appeared to like him, and to like what he said, it was Tommy's bad fortune to have Celestia arrive from her snow-white car and steal his audience away from him. His "sea of upturned faces" became a pool, with more than half the faces turned away to try and see what all the excitement was about further down the street, and everybody getting more and more restless and inattentive. A sudden tremendous cheering took the rest of Tommy's audience away from him on the run, with the exception of one young woman, who wore a thick brown veil and was half concealed by the stem of an elm.

For a moment or two Tommy did not see her. His eyes were on the backs and twinkling legs of his fast disappearing audience, and there was a smile on his face, half rueful resignation and half amusement. He did not notice the woman until she called attention to herself by speaking.

"Don't stop," she said; "they haven't all gone. It isn't fair to me. I've come a long way to hear you."

With an exclamation of pleasure Tommy leaped down from his rostrum and ran to greet her. "Why, Mary Blackstone," he exclaimed, "what the dickens are you doing way down here?"

"I told you I came to hear you speak. You are getting to be rather famous, you know, and I thought it was my duty—her eyes sparkled under the veil—to hear you at least once."

"Well," said Tommy, smiling back, "you missed all the good parts."

They turned and walked aoward the little city park.

"What are you really doing in this far away place, Mary? You didn't do all that traveling just to hear me talk through my hat, did you?"

"No, I didn't, really; and you didn't really talk through your hat. I came as a matter of fact to tell you something I think you ought to know."

They reached the little park, chose a bench, and sat down.

"You'll promise not to let anyone know you got the story from me."

"I'll promise that, of course."

"Of course," said Mary, "if Mr. Barclay is the next president it will be a great thing for his friends, among whom he has told me so many times to include myself that I have ended by believing him. It would be a great thing for me."

"It would be a sorry thing for the country."

"I'm not so sure of that. He doesn't think so."

"I credit him with the utmost sincerity, but with absolute lack of political vision. If they pass the new constitution, and my father once gets in the saddle, only death will get him out. His successor would be a man of his own choice, and we should have ceased to be a free people."

"We should have begun to be an efficient people."

"It is better to be free."

"That is a matter of opinion, and anyway it's neither here nor there at the moment. If he is elected it will be a great thing for me, won't it?"

"You would have more position and power."

"Well, I'm willing to forego that. I'm willing, if you like, to say that it is better to be free than efficient; better to be poor voluntarily and unwashed, than rich and clean by force. There, I admit all that. What do you think of the political prospects?"

"I think," said Tommy, solemnly, "that the election depends on Celestia. If she can reach enough people before she breaks down from overwork, she will elect her president and her congress. I've seen this over and over. We send our best men to a place, they make a good impression, show the people the fallacies in Celestia's gospel of prosperity and happiness, and then, having laid a good foundation of sanity and honesty, along comes Celestia and sweeps the place off its feet, and in twenty minutes undoes the work of a dozen good men."

"But people don't really swallow her assertion that she was sent from heaven for the especial purpose of running a political campaign?"

"Many swallow it. She does herself, you know. And hers is no political campaign, it's revolution."

"If her faith in herself could be shattered?"

"How could it? The best detectives in the world have been working on her origin. No clue leads anywhere. If she doesn't come from heaven, where does she come from?"

"She comes," said Mary, "out of the heart of a gigantic conspiracy."

"She is no conspirator."

"Unconsciously only. Tommy, where the detectives have failed, I haven't. I know all about Celestia—who she was, where she went to, where she comes from, and where she's going!"

"Going?" exclaimed Tommy, in such a voice that a pang of jealousy shot through Miss Blackstone's heart.

"Many ignorant people," said she, "actually believe that Celestia is divine and descended from heaven. As her beauty fades and her voice loses its power, if, in some way she should show herself human—marry—have a child—the belief of those people would turn into disbelief. But, if having seated the new government firmly, she should vanish in the heyday of her beauty, innocence and power—vanish as mysteriously as she appeared—more than half the nation will end by believing that she was truly the Daughter of God. Believe me, Tommy, the powers that produced her at the right time aren't going to let her grow old and wrinkled. She will go back to heaven. And a nation will believe that the government she gave it was derived from God and must be right."

"Do you mean they would murder her?"

"As calmly as you would murder a mosquito."

"This is frightful!" exclaimed Tommy, jumping to his feet.

"I haven't told you who she is."

"True. You haven't."

He sat down again.

"Profesor Stilliter," said Mary, "selected her as a perfect specimen of childhood. She was kidnaped and brought up in a great underground system of caverns somewhere in the Adirondacks."

"But she would remember."

"No other child has ever been brought up as she was. From the moment they kidnaped her she was kept in a state of hypnosis. She was taught by hypnotic suggestion. The caves in which she was brought up seemed vast to her as space itself. Bright angels appeared to come and go. Through the caves is the only access to a certain mountain top. There she could exercise in the fresh air unseen by anyone. Her physical life was just as real as yours or mine; her mental life was nothing but dreams, hallucinations and imaginings. Stilliter was her teacher, and one other man."

"What man?" asked Tommy.

"His name doesn't matter. Just before it was time to bring her to earth, he—well, they caught him trying to make her kiss him, and ever since then he's been—dead.

"Her memory tells her of no physical ills or wants, only of a wonderful ineffable disembodied serene state of happiness and holiness. There was a voice—to which all bowed down in worship. That voice told her at last that she must descend to earth and do as she—has done."

"What an extraordinary story!" exclaimed Tommy, "but incredible."

"No," said Mary, "not in the least; extraordinary, if you like; but not incredible. You don't know Stilliter. Her name before they took her to heaven and named her Celestia was plain—Amesbury."

At that name a host of old and poignant recollections flooded Tommy's mind. For the second time he sprang to his feet.

"My God," he cried, "my little Amesbury girl. Of course she is. A hundred times I've been on the verge of that knowledge—and yet because it was impossible that she should be—the definite knowledge never really came to me. For heaven's sake!"

"Now do you believe me?" asked Mary, coldly.

"I must Mary. But how did you find this out?"

"It doesn't matter. I wormed it out of somebody. Now what will you do?"

"I'll go down to Celestia and tell her about herself, and shake her faith in herself."

"You'll need proofs."

"You think so? I'm not sure. Are there any?"

"I can't produce any. But—"

"But what?"

"Well, it might be a good thing if you could locate the cave. That's the only thing I can think of offhand."

Tommy fell into a brown study. Then he said:

"Mary, what is your motive in telling me all this?"

"Perhaps I don't want Mr. Barclay elected. Perhaps I dislike Celestia so much that I want her to be humbled even at my own expense. The motive doesn't matter."

Mary's real motive in making the foregoing revelation to Tommy was not entirely clear even to herself. Above all things she wanted to be rid of Celestia. The promise of a fortune in pearls to the person who brought her definite word of Celestia's definite elimination from mundane affairs had not borne fruit. Now Mary thought that a collapse of Celestia's power over men, through a shaking of her faith in herself, might produce definite results. Celestia, on learning that she was not a divine being but a faker, would become not only valueless to the archconspirators, but a stern and awful menace to their plans. They would succeed swiftly and without mercy where Mrs. Gunsdorf had failed.

It wasn't for want of trying that Mrs. Gunsdorf had failed. It wasn't because her spirit was weak or her arm nerveless, nor because the knife which she carried in her stocking wasn't long enough and sharp enough for her purpose. Advantageous opportunities for doing the murder and escaping undetected were rare. She had had but one, for Celestia was so surrounded and guarded as a rule that she was hard to come at. Mrs. Gunsdorf had only had one good chance. She had only failed then because she had been so foolish as to look Celestia in the eyes, and the power to do the wicked deed had been stricken from her.

She didn't have money enough to track Celestia all over the country. (Mary should have provided for this.) But she had done her best.

Now another excellent opportunity seemed to offer.

So Tense Were Mrs. Gunsdorf's Muscles That the Handle of the Knife Was Wet in Her Hand.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Celestia's snow-white train, practically deserted, occupied the siding. It would be taken off at midnight, and run slowly so as to arrive not too early in the chief city of the North woods.

Mrs. Gunsdorf chose a moment when no one seemed to be looking, and boarded Celestia's own car at the observation end. She knew the room in which Celestia slept, and entered it. There was a three-quarter bed in white enamel, a bureau ditto, an arm chair, and a door ajar, that disclosed the bath room. The little suite fairly dazzled with its cleanness and its whiteness. If there is anything in contrast, it was a wonderful setting for a bloody crime.

The room offered only one hiding place. Mrs. Gunsdorf knelt, flattened herself to the floor and crawled under the bed.

As always, an orating crowd followed Celestia to her car, or, as on the present occasion, surrounded her to it. Beside Professor Stilliter, she walked among them, talking with gentle persuasion to those nearest her. When she mounted the steps of her car they cheered her to the echo. She had to show herself several times and make little speeches before they finally dispersed and went about their business.

Tommy Barclay alone remained. He mounted the steps of the car and knocked on the glass of the door. Professor Stilliter opened it.

"Could I see Celestia a minute?"

"I'm afraid not. She's dead tired."

But Celestia had heard Tommy's voice and came out of her stateroom, where she had gone to lie down.

"I'm not too tired," she called, "and I'd like to see him."

"But only for a minute," cautioned Professor Stilliter, and then, with seeming reluctance, he withdrew and closed behind the door of the passage that led past the staterooms to the dining-room end of the car. But the professor went no farther. Having closed the door, he applied his ear to a hole that he had bored in it for just such occasions as this, and listened.

"I'm sorry," Celestia was saying, "that I had to steal your audience away from you. It would have been more sportsmanlike to let you finish speaking and then to have tried to steal their hearts and minds away from you. Wouldn't it?"

"Yes," said Tommy, slowly, "I think it would, Miss—Amesbury."

Behind his door Professor Stilliter started as if someone had stuck a knife in him.

"Why Miss Amesbury?" asked Celestia.

"Because it's your real name. I knew you when you were a baby. We were great friends. Then you went away. My father said you had gone to heaven—so you had, but only to a place that you were taught to believe was heaven. Then you came to earth—and I've recognized you. I wonder I didn't before. But I do now. There's no mistake possible."

"What utter nonsense are you up to now?"

"Sometimes little girls wear socks and chubby brown legs. The little Amesbury girl had a little round mole just under her left knee."

"So have I," said Celestia, "what of it?"

"Why this man Stilliter," said Tommy, "who kidnaped you when you were a kiddie, has taught you to think, by mental suggestion, that you are what you think you are, instead of just a lovely girl of flesh and blood like the rest of us."

She shook her head and murmured something about "nonsense," but there was something so earnest and convincing in the young man's voice and manner that what he said could not but shock and distract her.

"I'm sure you believe this, Tommy; but it's quite out of the question. I remember my heavenly home as if I had left it yesterday."

"You remember a mental condition, not a physical reality."

There was a short pause. Then, "What you've said ought not to bother me at all," said Celestia. "I don't know why you say it, or why you think it's true, but please don't argue with me about it now. I'm so tired that I'd almost like to believe it myself."

Professor Stilliter pricked up his ears at that, for he knew very well wanting to believe a thing lives next door to believing it. If Celestia could be made to believe what Tommy had told her, her influence would be at an end. She would have to be got rid of. The professor trembled. The triumvirate would be for putting her underground. So would he; but he would be for putting her, not in the grave, but back in those vast caverns whence she came, and where he, who had power over her, could visit her at his convenience.

He wanted the woman more than the triumph of that cause in whose interest he had trained her so painstakingly for so many years.

Let her believe. He might be willing to help convince her. He wasn't sure.

"If," said Tommy, "I can show you their cave—if I can find it—then would you believe?"

"I don't know," said Celestia. "I'm so tired. Please don't talk to me about it now." Then she smiled at him and said: "It's a wonderful invention, though. Find the cave first and then talk to me."

"Celestia—don't you want to believe?"

Then Professor Stilliter heard a sound that almost made him foam at the mouth. "She does want to believe," he thought, "and the will and her usefulness will be at an end, and she will belong to me. Why not anticipate a little?"

He stood trembling. He heard Celestia enter her stateroom and lie down with a sigh of weariness. He listened for a long time. The sound of her breathing told him she had not yet gone to sleep. And anyway it was not in his mind to disturb her now. That would be for later, when the train was in motion and the lights out.

So at last he walked stealthily off to his own car and called for a big glass of brandy and soda.

Meanwhile Celestia lay on her bed, her hands folded on her breast, and her mind reviewing and reviewing the statements that Tommy had made.

And under the bed, trembling with hatred and excitement, lay Mrs. Gunsdorf, waiting for that time when Celestia's regular breathing should tell her that the defenseless object of her hatred was sound asleep.

So tense were Mrs. Gunsdorf's muscles that the handle of the stabbing knife which she had drawn from her stocking was wet in her hand.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)